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ABSTRACT

On September 5, 1986, the Elementary School Center convened a national, interdisciplinary group of respondents and observer-participants to debate the main issues raised in Secretary of Education Bennett's "First Lessons" and to note the areas which need additional attention. Respondents and observer-participants included public and private educators, researchers, pediatricians, local, state, and national policymakers, and several members of Secretary Bennett's Elementary Education Study Group. Discussion is reported under six headings. Part 1 focuses on strengths and concerns of "First Lessons." Part 2 focuses on children, parents, and the community of adults involved in elementary education. Part 3 focuses on curriculum issues concerning reading and writing, integrating subject matter, specialist teachers, social studies and global issues, and time. Part 4 focuses on teaching and administrative personnel in the elementary school. Part 5 focuses on school policy issues, such as standards and testing, resources and equity, class size, preschool education, and special education and gifted children. Part 6 briefly specifies actions to take in order to improve elementary education. Included are a list of observer-participants, respondents' profiles, and a description of the Elementary School Center. (RH)

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Focus on the Child:
Advancing Elementary Education

The Elementary School Center Colloquium on "First Lessons: A Report On Elementary Education in America"

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September, 1986

Focus on the Child:
Advancing Elementary Education

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The intellectual energy, articulateness, and collective experience of the respondents more than fulfilled the Center's goal of debating the main issues raised in Secretary Bennett's Report and magnifying the fundamental importance of elementary education.

Walter Birge, III deserves special acknowledge for skillfully and sensitively moderating the Colloquium. The observer-participants enriched the day's proceedings through their sharing of practical insights and their sensitive observations — for this the Center is particularly grateful.

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"FOCUS ON THE CHILD"
Colloquium Respondents

Walter W. Birge, III
President, Board of Fellows
Elementary School Center
Headmaster, The Fenn School

Bertha D. Campbell
Former Head, NY State Education
Department, Bureau of Child
Development & Parent Education

Lucianne B. Carmichael
Education Writer &
Former Principal
McDonogh 15

Ray Cortines
Superintendent
San Francisco Public Schools

Melvin D. Levine, M.D.
Advisory Council Chairperson
Elementary School Center
Director
Clinical Center for the Study
of Development and Learning
Professor of Pediatrics
University of North Carolina

Joan Lipsitz
Program Director, Education
Lilly Endowment

Vito Perrone
Vice President
Carnegie Foundation for the
Advancement of Teaching

Alice G. Pinderhughes
Superintendent, Baltimore
Public Schools

Ruth E. Randall
Commissioner of Education
State of Minnesota

Samuel G. Sava
Executive Director
National Association of
Elementary School Principals

Lawrence J. Schweinhart
High/Scope Educational
Research Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

"First Lessons" provides an important opportunity to change forever the way we look at elementary education in our nation. It provides an opportunity to acknowledge the fundamental and ultimate importance of this level of education. Many appreciate the crucial importance of the elementary school in providing the foundation for all learning — but few behave as if they understand this. That the elementary school is the most important level of schooling has been recognized as often as it has been denied in practice.

It is high time that attention is drawn to the fundamental importance and intricate complexities of elementary education and the elementary school years.

Secretary William Bennett has written a report which provides an ideal stepping off point from which to discuss and expand upon the primary issues of elementary education today and in the years ahead. Believing that educators and other professionals concerned with children and youth have a responsibility to highlight, discuss, and debate the matters of key importance and recognizing the consequences of not bringing these issues to national attention for collaborative exploration, the Elementary School Center, on September 5, 1986, convened a national, interdisciplinary group of respondents and observer-participants. Its goals: to enhance "First Lessons," to debate the main issues raised, and to note the areas which needed additional attention. The Center selected as its title, "FOCUS ON THE CHILD: Advancing Elementary Education," because of the belief that the child must be the central point of attention as well as the concentration of one's thoughts and actions when one examines and discusses elementary education.

Respondents and observer-participants included public and private educators, researchers, pediatricians, local, state and national policymakers, and several members of Secretary Bennett's Elementary Education Study Group.

The ESC invited these individuals because they represent a wide variety of experiences and perspectives, yet share an abiding concern for and appreciation of 3- to 13-year-old children and those adults who work with them.

This was a propitious moment to bring together such a group to set the tone for a national debate on the key issues affecting all those who are responsible for the elementary education of our nation's children.

It is difficult to convey the richness, intensity, and stimulating environment of the Colloquium. The participants stated afterward that they found the discussion challenging to their thinking. The excitement generated was inspiring. As expected, the questions raised outnumbered the answers given. Nevertheless, there was general agreement on certain strengths and concerns in "First Lessons." Next steps are presented in this document, with the expectation that they will become a springboard for continued discussion.

Just as the Bennett Report included a section entitled "Will It All Fit?" the Colloquium attendees were aware that a day's discussion would, by definition, limit the number and depth of issues that could be discussed. Some specific topics which are of legitimate concern to elementary educators but which were not discussed at length includes: environmental education, bilingual education, rural education, independent school and private school education, sex equity, collegiality, guidance and pupil personnel services, vocational education, career exploration, values education, sex education, and details of implementing the Report.

At the start of the Colloquium, the moderator convened the respondents around a table in the center of the room. Each respondent spoke for five minutes about the Report. Then they discussed the Report chapter by chapter. The 23 observer-participants sat in a semi-circle around the respondents, and in the afternoon they were given the opportunity to comment for two minutes on the Report or the respondents' observations (their comments are interspersed throughout the text). The last hour of the Colloquium each respondent reflected for five minutes on the day's dialogue.

There were three means for recording the content of the day's proceedings: audio and video taping and note taking. The observer-participants met again in the evening to reflect on the day's discussions and these reflections together with

transcripts of the discussions provided information about these proceedings.

Since the release of "A Nation at Risk" in April, 1983 describing "the rising tide of mediocrity" in our nation's secondary schools, we have been flooded with education reports from a wide array of commissions and task forces. Furthermore, in the last 3½ years, 700 pieces of legislation have been introduced across the country, spurred by the real and perceived ills in our nation's schools. Many voices have begun to plead for more action on existing reports rather than more proliferation of observations, opinions, and recommendations. And our nation's governors have recently indicated their desire to lead the next wave of educational reform.

Because "First Lessons" is essentially free of the kind of alarming language which provoked reactions to previous reports, will it stimulate sufficient interest? Because it does not point to widespread problems in our nation's elementary schools, will it fail to compel discussion? Because it deals with a level of schooling which is traditionally neglected, will it fail to excite interest? Because it makes some specific recommendations, will its more global points be ignored?

It is expected that this Colloquium was the first in a series of hundreds of discussions in schools, parent organizations, school board meetings, organizations of professionals concerned with children and youth, legislatures, city councils, college classrooms, foundations, and community organizations. Secretary Bennett's Report and this report, "FOCUS ON THE CHILD," can serve as a stimulus to this much-needed exploration of the issues related to significant elementary education.

"First Lessons" provides an important national commitment to the cruciality of elementary education in our nation's future. "FOCUS ON THE CHILD" provides useful guidelines for research and recommendations for actions which can affect the way we educate our nation's elementary children — let us not underestimate its primary importance to our nation's children and ultimately to our interdependent world community.

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PART 1

Focus on Strengths and Concerns of "First Lessons"

At the start of the Elementary School Center Colloquium, each of the respondents presented a brief overview of what they perceived to be the strengths and concerns of the Secretary's Report.

"The first thing I can say about this Report is that it's high time." This comment, made by Bertha Campbell, typified the respondents' views about a central strength of Secretary Bennett's Report. In Samuel Sava's words: "What I wanted this Report to do was to alert the nation that the critical years for many of our children are the early years of education. I think it did just that." The participants also agreed to the challenge set by Walter Birge, who urged them to heighten the dialogue and develop a creative tension with the Secretary, with Washington, and with the American people in an effort to raise the profile of elementary education.

Several respondents went on to point out specific strong points made in "First Lessons." Vito Perrone, in his comments, touched on a number: "There are some very good lines: 'Children are not the property of the state, but neither are they the property of their parents. They are not property at all.' 'Parents are the central figures, captains of the vessel on which children voyage to maturity.' 'An elementary school that treats the arts as the province of a few gifted children is a school that needs an infusion of soul.' Some of Bennett's language has wonderful literary qualities; some of his hopes in fact are even uplifting."

> I thought this was a good report, not because I thought the Secretary was going to use General Patton to become an elementary principal. I thought it was a good report because he said some things that we now can use to represent kids.
>
> —Samuel Sava

Perrone continued: "I particularly appreciated his support of books as opposed to textbooks; active as opposed to passive learning; ideas, playfulness, openness as opposed to lifeless facts, drill, busywork, and a host of certainties; writing as meaning-making, as personal expression, as thought-as opposed to writing as penmanship and syllable-combining; and educating as broad, connecting to community life as well as to schools.

"I appreciated further his skepticism about standardized tests, his ambivalence about computers, his willingness to encourage the arts and citizenship, the conceptualization he is willing to embody with participation and responsibility and not just flag-waving and anthem-singing. He is also positive about teachers and parents; I applaud him for that. I like the celebration of the 'diversity of hues and languages, of religions and beliefs, of cultural habits and mores.' He noted: 'There is no more exhilarating sight in American education today than a second or fifth grade class comprised of 25 children from almost as many lands.' I agree. Our nation is indeed richer because of the diversity of our people."

The call by Secretary Bennett for Americans to view the education of young children as a covenant with the family, the adult community, and the elementary schools was also lauded. Said Joan Lipsitz: "The Report acknowledges the role not only of parents, but of the community in nurturing, caring for, and educating children. It refers to this as a covenant, which is both a wonderful word and a wonderful concept."

Lucianne Carmichael saw as the document's strongest theme the total responsibility of the state and local communities in all decisions. And in that theme, she saw a strength. "It makes clear that the leadership and the vision are not going to come from the federal government and it better darn well come from us," she said. "It tells us where we stand, lets us know that we'd better go home and figure out what we're going to do about these kids. The door is open for us."

Although most of the participants viewed the release of "First Lessons" as an important first step in bringing much-needed attention to the role of the elementary schools, they were not

without their concerns regarding its content.

Said Carmichael: "I do not find within the document any hard-hitting, thought-provoking, penetrating, powerful, or visionary suggestions." Perrone agreed: "When 'A Nation at Risk' was released, there was a good deal of electricity everywhere. There is no electricity in 'First Lessons.' It doesn't challenge anyone too much."

The respondents were especially concerned with the Report's failure to place more emphasis on the importance of child development. "First Lessons" overlooked the purpose of education as the growth and development of the individual, they said, and failed to stress the basic importance of child development to teaching.

Other Colloquium participants raised as concerns the issues of equity and the diminishing federal role in education. Commented Lipsitz: "The Report is less than forthright about the vast differences in resources and outcome of public schools in America. This is an issue we must grapple with, especially as we now insist upon that elusive, diffuse, and increasingly political goal of excellence.

"I think as a result of this report, we must be even more worried about the most disenfranchised of our society who have few options by virtue of poverty, family limitations, race, and sex, who need special attention and additional commitment, even covenant, from adults that only the federal government can stimulate adequately," Lipsitz said.

Picking up that thread, Perrone added his concern that "First Lessons" is "conspicuously silent" about current federal efforts and suggests no fresh initiatives. With regard to those most in need, he said, it is not adequate to assert that the schools are getting better and that they are in fact quite good. "For many children suffering in poverty, living in inadequate housing, confronted by considerable social disruption, often facing the continuing vestige of discrimination and the like," he said, "the schools they attend have needs greater than local resources can provide, and Bennett seems unwilling to acknowledge that."

Among some of the respondents' additional concerns were that the report did not focus more strongly on the role of the teacher as central to learning, that the Secretary's recommendation to deregulate the principalship ignored the importance of having school leaders with instructional experience, and that the Report, in making sweeping recommendations for the elementary years, failed to acknowledge the differences between the first years of elementary school and the later, adolescent years of elementary school.

Yet other of the participants expressed concern that the Report made no mention of the difficulty of translating its recommendations into actual classroom practice, that it failed to consider the effect of our changed society on the elementary school, that it did not include any recommendations on environmental or conflict-resolution curricula, and that its recommendations concerning class size were unrealistic.

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PART 2

Focus on Children, Parents, and the Community of Adults

Children

"I was very concerned about this Report's unwillingness to recognize diversity," said Melvin Levine, " not so much diversity of bilingual, black, and other ethnicities, but that even within those groups, there is extraordinary heterogeneity of needs. I feel the need for pluralism in the face of what seems to be a tremendous commitment to uniformity.

"From my perspective as a clinician," he continued, "I see many casualties-very serious and dangerous casualties-that come from a reluctance of schools to acknowledge diversity when the adult world is actually dependent upon enormous diversity."

Although some of the respondents felt it would be useful to think ideally in terms of developing individual educational plans for children, Bertha Campbell said, "I find educational plans focus a tremendous amount on what children learn. And from where I sit we need to pay attention to how children learn because that's equally important. I want teachers to keep track of what children are doing and focus their teaching on children's strengths and most absorbing interests and not children's deficits."

There appeared to be agreement that the acknowledgement of diversity among students must be reflected in school practices — the wide variety of student characteristics, learning styles, and predispositions should directly affect what goes on in elementary schools.

And participants cited the implications of new research and insights on children and learning for continual, interdisciplinary in-service development of teachers.

Among their concerns was the need for schools to integrate new child development knowledge into elementary school practices. The range and span of developmental characteristics of the pre- kindergarten-through-8th-grade child is vast, they said, and must be taken into account in our schools.

Levine said, "There's some fascinating new knowledge about memory and how that works in children, with new knowledge about different patterns of reasoning and different cognitive styles. This has such implications for teachers that it's almost scandalous for a teacher to be facing a group of children and not be highly educated in these areas, for a middle school teacher not to be extremely knowledgeable about puberty. For us to turn around and try to teach parents when the teachers don't know about it is a real problem, and I certainly agree with Ray that this kind of rapidly generated knowledge just has to be infused into both pre-service and in-service ongoing teacher education to really make optimal use of what we know. One of the key messages from this Report is that all children struggle, not only those labeled 'learning disabled.'"

A developmental issue in school children that we often see is the difference in a sense between teaching breadth and a kind of compulsion in our society that many parents seem to have: the child has to have soccer Monday, Kung-Fu Tuesday, clarinet Wednesday. What I see in this report is more of the same — "let's add as many more items to the menu as we can" without really pursuing a critical issue called the acquisition of expertise. What about giving a child a feeling of having enormous depth and being the leading expert in San Francisco on local spiders or some other issue. This is how a child really learns to pursue knowledge in depth and sees the romance of getting beneath the surface things. But it comes perhaps at the sacrifice of touching absolutely every conceivable base.

— Melvin Levine, M.D.

Parents

Lawrence Schweinhart observed that the Report included reference to Harold Hodgkinson's "incantation of concerns with demographic statistics, changing families, and changing poverty, increasing poverty, and ethnic diversity." But he lamented the lack of follow-through and said such concerns should have fueled at least a large part of the Report because they help to define the dynamic nature of the elementary schools. He also noted their role in keeping the focus on the social problems to which the schools are ultimately connected. And the respondents expressed dismay that the implications of these "new demographics" were not fully discussed in the Report in terms of what schools should do differently.

Schools need to challenge parents to participate, the respondents said, and to welcome their involvement as co-educators.But Joan Lipsitz noted: "We can't talk about parents without talking about the developmental perspective. It's been my experience that many parents have totally inappropriate expectations about early adolescent development," she continued. "Puberty is a universal phenomenon which takes every parent by surprise, and it need not. Schools that have a developmental perspective and engage adults in learning about their children have parents who will do anything for that school. They will march on the school board, and will even march on the state superintendent because the school is answering the one question that they most deeply want to know: Is this normal?"

Lipsitz noted her concern with "First Lessons'" perspective on children. "What's disturbing is that instead of taking the developmental perspective, this Report takes the discipline perspective that we have in high schools, and takes it down not just to the middle schools but into the elementary schools." The Report, she said, should have taken the developmental perspective found in early childhood and moved it up through the elementary schools, into middle schools and high schools. Instead, "it's going exactly in the wrong direction."

Walter Birge said he was concerned that Bennett "wrestled

with his own predilections and training and grafts secondary school priorities into the elementary school. All too often," he noted, "this is very common for non-elementary school educators to do."

A number of respondents stressed the need to review further the whole issue of parent education. "Sometimes we get so busy as educators," said Ray Cortines, "that we do not help understand or involve them in the educational process so they can see it as sequential — not just as a series of happenings."

Vito Perrone observed, "Schools and communities coalesce and have common interests; those interests can be shared. At the point at which the curriculum gets so far removed from parents that they don't understand, it is hard to keep them connected.

"Parents have something to contribute, something social and cultural to contribute. We have parents with all this wonderful diversity. My mother would have appreciated an opportunity to have shared her cultural background in the community in which we grew up in Michigan, but she was kept out by language and cultural barriers and the school was so alien. The school is alien right now to large numbers of people because they see no connecting point."

> Only 27% of American adults have children in the schools. We're asking the American people to provide support for schools to which their children probably don't go. If we don't think about education in terms of the covenant, of everybody having some responsibility for these children, then the school is going to fail.
>
> —Milton Goldberg
> Observer-Participant

The Community of Adults

"First Lessons" urged Americans to view children in the context of the entire community. "So long as we view education as something that happens between 8:30 and 2:20 inside the doors of a big red brick building," the Report stated, "we lose sight of the basic truth that 'elementary education' is more than 'elementary school.'"

Joan Lipsitz agreed. "Three to six p.m. is a golden time period in which the community can once again assert its role in the rearing of children and youth," she said. "Instead of constantly being so negative about the latchkey issue, we can turn it around to a positive opportunity for the community."

But others lamented the Report's failure to address the issue of how society — the community of adults — has changed. Said Lucianne Carmichael: "Nothing will change in education until our thinking changes and I did not see major ideas toward changing our thinking about parents, about how poor people are different, about how the world needs diversity."

Several of the Colloquium respondents, citing examples of such changes, described the "underclass" of at-risk children. "I believe it is the duty of schools to find ways of providing support for children who don't have a support system in their homes," said Alice Pinderhughes. Ruth Randall said she saw the provision of such support as the role of the community at large. "I don't believe the elementary school can address such needs," she said. "But certainly the larger community can tackle some of these issues with very real help from parents."

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PART 3

Focus on Curriculum

Reading and Writing

"You don't have to start with phonics," said Bertha Campbell, contradicting the Secretary's Report. She elaborated, "In the beginning reading process you start with the learner. Children begin to read when they are scribbling and read their scribbles back to you. You give kids things to talk about and then you listen. It doesn't mean you don't talk about sounds, but that whole notion of playing alphabet lotto with two-year-olds makes me unhappy."

"First Lessons" acknowledged that children begin to fail at about fourth grade. Both Joan Lipsitz and Melvin Levine concurred, and Levine described what he called "'the grand finale' at fourth and fifth grades when all the sophisticated linguistic skills come together at that pre-adolescent age and join the confluence of memory and reasoning ability. That integration is considerably more important than phonics."

Several respondents addressed the discrepancy between the goal of teaching every child to read and the standardized measures of success. Lipsitz pointed out: "We probably all liked the quote from the Report, 'No one ever gave a child a textbook for Christmas,' but when we get to the examples of successful schools, we're told 90% of kids read at this mythical grade level or above. So there is a conflict between having children read real books, not textbooks, and then being judged by performance on standardized tests."

Not only do the tests drive reading and writing, but as Vito Perrone said, "the culture of beginning reading is embedded in basal readers. The textbooks make sure vocabulary is limited by removing the possibility of any good literature, and by making sure that there are no distractions of language. Teachers use skill sheets, facsimiles of metropolitan tests, and few books. This does raise test scores. Kids score well at grade three, but they don't do so well at grades four, five, and six. Teachers who raise scores this way don't think children are reading very well, even when their scores go up."

Levine urged the need to be clear about what is meant by

reading. "Is reading what we measure on multiple choice tests? A fair number of students do well on these tests, but are unable to retell or summarize what they have just read in a book. They just happen to have a good recognition memory for picking among right or multiple choice tests. Are they competent readers? Is this what we mean by reading?"

And Lipsitz added, "Years ago when I switched from teaching 12th grade to teaching junior high kids who were reading below grade level, I decided it was irresponsible to teach them without my having more knowledge about how middle years adolescents learn to read. I went through catalogues across the entire country and found only two courses that might possibly help me. Finding this knowledge about the middle years child is still a problem. We must make an effort, which should parallel our effort to reduce adult illiteracy, to address the complex issues of teaching middle years children to read."

Levine and Alice Pinderhughes suggested that we need funds for staff development so teachers can be exposed to the latest research on how children learn. Teachers should have the largest possible repertoire of techniques to reach diverse children, they said.

> —We should think about non-graded classrooms because we know that some children only need more time before they develop reading skills.
>
> —Samuel Sava

Subject Matter Integration

Although "First Lessons" mentioned the importance of unifying a child's day by blurring the lines of traditional subject matter disciplines, several respondents were troubled by the contradiction in the Report that subjects were treated separately. Lucianne Carmichael said she had hoped that the Report would "enlarge our thinking about the interrelationship of all knowledge and of all experience, but it was rather an accounting of a traditional curriculum." Walter Birge was particularly troubled by the separation of reading from writing and speaking.

Samuel Sava, on the other hand, lauded the fact that writing was "broken out" for emphasis in the Report. "I thought it was important for the Report to deal with writing separately because I personally think we'd be less than honest [if we did not admit] that we are not engaging our children in the amount of writing that should be done in the early years," he said. And Melvin Levine reminded the group that "we need to address the needs of the non-verbal child, the non-linguist, who has a great role to play in the adult world."

Levine proposed a reason for adopting Bennett's suggestion that children write about all subjects, especially math and science. "Trying to obliterate some differences between English, math, and science allows students to see that the abstract material has relevance to reading and writing. These disciplines become more easily accessible to more children."

Although the Report said that "an elementary school that treats the arts as the province of a few gifted children, or views them only as recreation and entertainment, is a school that needs an infusion of soul," some of the respondents were disappointed that the arts were "hung out there separately." But Sava suggested the possibility that the arts were separate in order to highlight the topic and perhaps to counter the feeling that "arts are a frill."

Specialist Teachers

As part of their concern with keeping the elementary child's school day unified and free from fragmentation, the participants took on the issue of specialist teachers. Ray Cortines reiterated the complexities of elementary teaching. "We require teachers to be experts in twelve different fields, which is impossible, but elementary schools do not usually have specialists," he said.

Alice Pinderhughes, drawing from her experience as Baltimore superintendent, said she has found it easier and more creative, even in the earlier grades, to find specialists who have a proclivity for language arts, or science and math. With more knowledge, she noted, teachers may feel more comfortable with often neglected specialities. "Teachers," she said, "have to feel secure enough to let the kids go and just explore and create on their own, which to me, is real science instruction." Ruth Randall added, "There is no reason that we can't hire specialists in math or science and still support children's need for nurturance if teachers work as a team."

Vito Perrone suggested that rather than specialists, educators entertain the possibility of "joint inquiry." "It is vastly harder to teach science from a textbook than in a 'hands-on' program which engages the teacher and child as co-inquirers. When the textbook is fact-oriented, the teacher isn't participating in the inquiry with the child. 'First Lessons' even suggests we need the regular classroom teacher to teach science because it illustrates the point that science is for everyone, not just for scientists."

Social Studies and Global Issues

Secretary Bennett's recommendations on social studies have attracted national attention, and although the group noted the issue, there was not extensive discussion.

The Report rejected teaching social studies by centering on the child in the beginning years, and increasing his or her exposure to the world in subsequent years as the child develops. This distressed some respondents. "There are good reasons rooted in child development why one would focus on the child's own experience before moving out," Lawrence Schweinhart said.

Others were concerned by a lack of a global perspective. Said Ruth Randall, "I agree wholeheartedly that we need to know about our own country, to know about our government and our geography, but I think we need to look at the whole idea of international and global education."

The group supported the importance of learning foreign languages — a commitment to a global perspective and the diversity that it implies — but Melvin Levine issued a warning: "Foreign language is not everybody's cup of tea in high school or elementary school and we have to be careful about ramming another language down the throats of some students who are still struggling with English."

> There is a phase in the Report that talks about teachers 'imparting knowledge and skills' — I don't really think teachers impart knowledge and skills — children are not empty vessels. We teach children how to learn and hopefully we teach them how to teach themselves and be their own teachers. So I object to that emphasis, which seems to be pretty pervasive throughout the report.
>
> —Judith Birsh
> Observer-Participant

Time

Although the Secretary's Report said "more professional instruction can be delivered if teachers are spared extraneous chores," Vito Perrone made a case for retaining non-instructional activities such as playground and lunchroom duty as part of a teacher's role. "These activities provide important insights for teachers. They are opportunities for teachers to engage children in different ways and to observe them in other settings. We need all the observational opportunities possible and myriad ways to interact with children beyond the classroom." Walter Birge added, "Having lunch or sharing snack or being out on a playground with a child is an extraordinarily significant part of the relationship and ultimate dialogue between teacher and student."

"Down time is when children are not engaged in an active learning process," said Alice Pinderhughes. "Down time is when teachers pass out what I call 'purple-passion sheets' — dittos about which children could care less — and there is too much down time in elementary school."

In a debate over lengthening the school day, Lucianne Carmichael said, "I think those three months in the summertime are just one of the most wonderful times of childhood," and although others agreed that children exploring the world on their own is a worthy model, they questioned whether all children have this opportunity.

Ray Cortines said, "I believe the disadvantaged child and the child who is disenfranchised need to be involved in a learning environment that is loving, caring, and directed. We should extend the school year because young people, especially in urban centers, get into trouble. I do not want an extended school year to be voluntary. For more and more children there is no home environment. They may have a place to sleep — at grandmother's, at the aunt's, at the sister's, — but they are emancipated as elementary children. I do not believe there is now any way of reinforcing what they learn in that summer break time, so it becomes a regressive experience. An extended year needs to have choice built into

it, but we need to make sure the children in urban centers have the opportunities to compete with other young people who are not disenfranchised. I do not want kids glued to their seats in the summer. Learning is a continuing process and I want the child to become part of that ongoing pattern of learning."

Joan Lipsitz added: "We need to create these learning opportunities for all children. In fact we are doubly depriving the minority and poor children in inner cities by holding them in these classrooms where they are in their seats every minute working from workbooks while middle class children are out learning from peer counseling and serving the community. I don't want to hold these children in those classrooms for three more months or for two more months or for any more days. I want to free them up from that, but we need to make these programs available. Maybe using the summertime as a model of something experimental and creative could help influence what happens in the regular year."

> I object to the term time on task. My definition of a good classroom is one in which the teacher and the children live together democratically and they all do everything in that classroom to make it function. Since learning is continuous, uneven, and highly personalized, we are all learning all the time. The teacher's job is to be aware of the children's confusions and to make plans for taking care of some of those confusions.
>
> — Bertha Campbell

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PART 4

Focus on Elementary School Professionals

Principals

The issue of who should be a school principal has received national attention. The discussion moved immediately to deregulation. Vito Perrone encouraged an enlarged definition of school leadership: "I'm convinced that leadership can come from a variety of sources. I'm not sure that one needs to say absolutely that a principal is the only center for leadership in the school, and I would have been interested to have had leadership defined in some broader ways to include teachers and possibly even to include people in the community. The principal is not the only source for leadership in the school."

Ruth Randall also wanted teachers "to be empowered to take on part of the leadership of a school."

The respondents generally saw the principal as the instructional leader, and Samuel Sava saw extensive classroom experience as necessary for that role. The group expressed considerable agreement that principals need teaching experience and adequate professional preparation. Alice Pinderhughes stated this firmly, "I think it's critical that the principal be the instructional leader." She values their teaching role. "We require that our principals teach for one period a day and that gives them the opportunity to model good teaching for their teachers."

Lucianne Carmichael expressed concern about the opportunities principals truly had to provide leadership. "I feel that creative principals who think divergently, have a vision for their school and work around the bureaucracy to achieve that vision. But they are not supported by their school district. They operate in spite of sanctions and constraints. I know this to be a reality, not just for myself but for many principals that I know.

"This document did not touch on how school districts can be rethought and restructured in order to support what it is that makes a principal good. It's not necessarily the kind of thinking that makes it a good company man type of person, and yet this is what our school districts seem to spawn and seem to reward and in fact cause problems for those others who go about their work in a more divergent way.

"And I was disappointed that while the Report said there had to be a strong instructional leader there was no rethinking of our positions within school districts about how these people emerge."

Ray Cortines saw the principalship as a preserve of teachers, and as an option on the career ladder or the career lattice for the professional educator.

There was considerable discussion about how principals function. Perrone stated, "In some of our large cities the principal doesn't really have any control over his staff at all. In a number of settings principals have very little choice about which teachers come or which teachers leave. We need to think about the realities that exist in a lot of our schools and especially some of our large urban schools where the choices just don't exist for a lot of principals or a lot of teachers."

Joan Lipsitz voiced concern about the principals of middle schools. "In most states there is no special certification, or special training for a middle school principal. In many states no special training exists for teachers at the middle level. We have people assigned to middle schools and junior high schools who consider it a parking lot waiting to get into a high school. There is a total disregard in this section of 'First Lessons' for middle years education."

There is some talk here, as there's been in other forums, about the power of the teachers, which I totally agree with. I think teachers should have lots and lots of power to make decisions about the curriculum and about materials. But if the way success is judged is by standardized tests, or citywide tests, then it seems to me that I, the classroom teacher, am in a dilemma.

—Alice Seletsky

We talk a lot about child development, but we talk a lot about teacher training. I really think that it's teacher development that we want.

—Kathe Jervis
Observer-Participant

Teachers

The respondents returned to the process of certification at various times throughout the Colloquium. Bertha Campbell summarized the certification dilemmas: "I learned very early in my state education department career, that certification to teach has nothing to do with qualifications to teach. All certification means is that you've been exposed to 'X' number of courses, which brings us back again to the question 'How can you insure that these teachers can teach?'"

How much more liberal arts should be included in the preparation of teachers? Lucianne Carmichael urged us to use this opportunity to think more deeply about the education we require of teachers. "If we talk about reforming or transforming schools for children, I think we first have to transform the individuals who create those schools. We must transform them in terms of their knowledge about children and their knowledge of the world. I have been shocked at the lack of just general education of many teachers. I think if we change our thinking about what's important in elementary schools, by definition, then we have to change the quality of thinking about how we prepare people to shape those schools."

Melvin Levine warned not to neglect a focus on the child, when aiming to achieve an understanding of the subject matter. "Schools of education should be on the cutting edge in child development, in child health, and in child behavior. Then expert teachers of teachers could inform both pre-service and in-service education. The Secretary's Report," Levine added, "limited its discussion of the preparation of professionals to the role of the teacher and the principal." And he pointed to the other trained individuals that work in schools. "I've had a strong interest in school health over the years and that's a potential untapped resource that needs total reevaluation and reshuffling. There's guidance, there's school psychologists that represent an enormous power right now in schools, and their quality control and their development is a whole issue at the moment."

Perrone closed the discussion by declaring that teachers, to be effective, must grow all the time throughout their entire career.

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PART 5

Focus on School Policy

Standards and Testing

Secretary Bennett, in "First Lessons"' chapter on school policy, called on elementary schools to adhere to "fair but rigorous standards," to let children and parents alike know what achievements are expected from them, and to refrain from advancing students until those standards are met.

Colloquium respondents debated these recommendations. Although Ray Corlines stressed the importance of rigorous standards as a way to ensure that educators do not accept failure and the importance of national standards as a way to ensure equity, a number of participants pointed to the problems inherent in setting such standards. "Many a reform movement saw legislation passed establishing standards that are now used as a reward system to say who's doing well," said Samuel Sava. "That's been a disservice to the very children who need help the most."

And Melvin Levine stressed the need to take into consideration the diversity of children. Many children, he said, will be seriously jeopardized by an increased emphasis on such elements as rigor and standards. "Those who dedicate more resources to these areas," he cautioned, "may also have to dedicate resources to detention centers for those students for whom academic rigor is unrealistic given their individual cognitive style."

Several respondents also raised concerns with the tests that measure achievement. And many agreed with the Secretary's contention that testing can be overdone and should not "swamp the curriculum or dominate classroom time."

Resources and Equity

The twin themes of resources and equity surfaced again and again. Many pointed to the failure of "First Lessons" to recognize the sometimes tremendous differences in funding between poor and wealthy schools, minority and non-minority schools, and urban, suburban, and rural schools. In the words of Joan Lipsitz: "The Report is less than forthright about the vast differences in resources and outcome of public schools in America."

As an example, Lipsitz cited the issue of access to computers. When inner-city children have access, they often do rote work, she said. On the other hand, middle-class and academically "gifted" children — many of whom are "gifted" because they received their computer as a gift — spend their on-line time engaged in higher-order skills and creative thinking.

Respondents also faulted the Report for failing to highlight the federal government's responsibility to provide seed money for creative approaches in education, to support professional development, and to contribute to school improvement, especially with regard to those most in need. "I don't believe it is unfair, given the history of federal support, to have expected more from 'First Lessons' in regard to basic equity concerns," said Vito Perrone.

Yet other respondents criticized "First Lessons" for stating, on the one hand, that the United States spends "an immense amount of money" on the schools, and on the other hand, that "some elementary schools plainly lack the financial resources they need."

And Alice Pinderhughes objected to the Report's comments on funding. "I have to strongly disagree with the statement that money doesn't make a difference," she said. "Money is an issue in an urban center such as Baltimore city."

Class Size

"First Lessons'" section on class size began with the statement that "almost everyone has a strong opinion" about this issue. The Colloquium respondents were no exception, with most speaking in favor of significantly reduced student-teacher ratios.

Both Samuel Sava and Vito Perrone endorsed the recent recommendation by the National Governors Association for 15 to 1 ratios in the classroom, especially in the early grades and in urban school systems. Said Sava: "I think having 30 children in a first grade class is a mistake." And Perrone, who called the issue of class size "very prevalent," assailed the Report for suggesting that "perhaps more good can be done by providing the teacher of a large class with...a bevy of volunteer tutors."

Ruth Randall, who also applauded the governors' recommendation, stressed the importance of allowing the teacher to decide such issues as class size and grouping. "If the teachers were making the decisions," she noted, "it might be 15 to 1 — or it might be 2 to 1 at times."

> Diversity now has a different kind of definition: not only is it race, language, and socio-economic, but within each of those units, there is a new tier. I'm concerned about the tiers being extended either up or down, but also the gaps between the groups expanding so that the spectrum of diversity is continuing to grow. There's a greater distance between the groups and also there's a greater distance within the groups.
>
> —William Dandridge
> Observer-Participant

Preschool

With many states almost doubling their funding for early childhood education programs in the last two years, Lawrence Schweinhart called the Secretary's decision to focus on elementary education from the kindergarten level forward "a very serious oversight."

"The concerns of many, many elementary school principals extend downward, particularly to programs for four-year-olds, but also to programs for three-year-olds and others," he said.

Schweinhart also faulted the Report for the absence of a developmental perspective on early schooling. For this reason, he said, Bennett sees preschool education as "ambiguous in purpose" and "has effectively thrown out the early childhood baby with the bathwater."

Vito Perrone concurred, pointing to the need for available child care services, and high-quality programs for at-risk four- and possibly three-year-olds.

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Special Education and the Gifted Child

Central to the Colloquium respondents' discussion of special education and the education of gifted and talented children was deep concern over the mishandling of these areas in many of today's elementary schools.

Melvin Levine cautioned against the misuse of arbitrary eligibility criteria, which he said hurt children seriously by serving as self-fulfilling prophecies. Levine also warned against what he termed "the tremendous stress" placed on the practice of labeling children. These methods, he said, must be rethought and replaced by "excellent observation, description, and prescription based on description."

The Colloquium respondents also expressed concern over the status of programs for gifted children. "Such programs," said Walter Birge, "tend to pull students out of class, hype parents' expectations, and create an artificial stratification in the classroom."

The consideration of these areas led participants into a discussion of the controversial issues of tracking and grouping. Joan Lipsitz, pointing out the school's basic need to manage diversity, noted the difficulty of teaching in non-tracked schools. "I don't think schools track or put kids into special categories out of malice," she said. But she also called on educators to respond creatively to these issues and to find ways for schools to individualize classes without labeling and segregating students.

Vito Perrone added his perspective: "Tracking has been invidious, it dominates our schools right now," he said. "I think schools absolutely have to be untracked. That doesn't say that you cannot have instructional groupings of all kinds. But they ought to be shifting, they ought to be constantly changing."

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PART 6

Next Steps

The Elementary School Center Colloquium has set the stage for an essential consideration of elementary schooling. Now is the time for the American public to act.

The editors of this volume have selected several next steps from among possibilities raised by the participants. Everyone concerned with children must seize this moment of national attention to elementary education.

- Schools must make a greater effort to engage the larger community in their purposes. Community groups and organizations, as well as local businesses, should not only respond to urgent needs, but initiate programs, such as after-school and summer activities.

- America's ethnic, social, and cultural differences must be viewed as providing an opportunity to enrich our schools, not as a problem in need of a solution. But it is essential that the public recognize that the increased diversity of the school population calls for changes in established and familiar patterns and curriculum.

- Professional educators know how to observe and document children's learning. Schools must consider these existing alternatives to standardized evaluation as they choose equitable measures of how and what children learn.

- There is a clear need for more research on child development and the way children learn. Practitioners should not be viewed as the passive beneficiaries of knowledge, but as one of the sources of it.

- Those involved in the pre-service and in-service development of teachers and other school professionals must study and make use of current knowledge about children.

- The federal government must exercise its responsibility to provide leadership and direction in education. Without seeking to replace local and state authority, it must provide support and resources for innovative programs, teacher development, and educational equity.

- Public, independent, and private schools have much to share and to learn from each other, but their collaboration and dialogue are now weak. They have often been viewed — and have viewed themselves — as competitors that face different problems, owe their loyalties to different constituencies, and seek different goals. But their common interest is central and they must cooperate for the benefit of all children.

- The wide array of professionals concerned with children must collaborate to assure the kind of cross-fertilization that will greatly improve educational opportunities for the elementary school child.

- It is not enough for educators to recognize the importance of collegiality; they must allow time for these collaborative efforts. Collaborators must include not only teachers and administrators, but guidance counselors, health professionals, and other personnel too often neglected.

- Not all schools are alike in their composition, atmosphere, and dynamics. As a consequence, measures to enhance their effectiveness must take account of the culture of the individual school.

- Schools must build on their own strengths and recognize their own complexities rather than blindly adopting formulas and designs which have proven effective in other schools.

- It is essential to view the different levels of schooling as a continuum so that the focus is on the child. By relinquishing the notion that education is a hierarchy in which the latest stage is always the most significant, each level of schooling must be defined by reference to the others. Learning will be enhanced by seizing the opportunities for continuity as well as the interrelationships that exist along the continuum.

"First Lessons" provides a compelling opportunity to change forever the way the nation looks at elementary education. The Elementary School Center Colloquium generated next steps

pertinent to the improvement of elementary schooling. These steps can serve as a stimulus to other groups for a continuing dialogue regarding the fundamental importance of elementary education. The Elementary School Center encourages and will assist interested professionals, policymakers and parents to hold colloquia to discuss the issues and suggest action.

"FOCUS ON THE CHILD"

Observer Participants

Judith Birsh
Former President, New York Branch
Orton Dyslexia Society
Adjunct Professor
Department of Special Education
Teachers College
Columbia University
(H) 2 West 67 Street
New York, NY 10023

Garda Bowman
Former Program Analyst
Bank Street College
New York City
(H) 60 West 66 Street
New York, NY 10023

Anne Bridgman
Writer, Editor, Consultant
Former Assistant Editor
EDUCATION WEEK
2141-807 P Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20037

**Lois Colt
Journalist
66 Liberty Avenue
Lexington, MA 02173

William L. Dandridge
Executive Director
Field Center for Teaching
and Learning
Bridgewater State College
Bridgewater, MA 02324

Milton Goldberg
Director, Programs for the
Improvement of Practice
U.S. Office of Education, OERI
555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W. #500
Washington, DC 20208

Zeva Greendale
Teacher Mentor, P.S. 398
New York City Board of Education
(H) 245 Amherst Street
Brooklyn, NY 11235

David Hall
Director, New York Branch
Educational Records Bureau
3 East 80th Street
New York, NY 10021

Kathe Jervis
Teacher & Writer
Editor, PATHWAYS
1170 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10029

Mamie L. Johnson
Principal, P.S. 14
421 East 106 Street
New York, NY 10029

*Anna M. Jones
Director
Charles River School
Dover, MA 02030

*Waldo Jones
Head, Lower School
Rippowam Cisqua School
Box 488
Bedford, NY 10506

*Gordon J. Klopf
Vice President
Board of Fellows
Elementary School Center
Dean Emeritus, Bank Street
College
New York, NY
(H) 70 LaSalle Street
New York, NY 10027

**Leanna Landsman
Editor-in-Chief & Publisher
INSTRUCTOR
545 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Pat Mattingly
Director, The Lamplighter School
11611 Inwood Road
Dallas, TX 75229

Marjorie McAllister
Director
Early Childhood Education Unit
New York City Board of Education
131 Livingston Street, Room 416
Brooklyn, NY 11201

*Lucille R. Perlman
Fellow, Elementary School Center
91 Central Park West #10A
New York, NY 10023

Alice Seletsky
5th-6th Grade Teacher
Central Park East I School
District 4, New York City
(H) 349 13th Street
Brooklyn, NY 11215

**Allan Shedlin Jr.
*Executive Director
Elementary School Center
2 East 103 Street
New York, NY 10029

Virginia Thompson
Executive Director
Lorentz Laboratory for
Collaborative Enterprises
136 South Broadway
White Plains, NY 10605

*Norman Wakely
Headmaster
Cardigan Mountain School
Canaan, NH 03741

*Esther H. Wender, M.D.
Director
Division of Behavioral
Pediatrics & Associate Professor
of Pediatrics
Montefiore Medical Center &
Albert Einstein College of
Medicine
111 East 210 Street
Bronx, NY 10467

*Sara Wilford
Director
Art of Teaching Graduate Program
Early Childhood Center
Sarah Lawrence College
Bronxville, NY 10708

*Justine Winters
Principal
Millerton & Amenia
Elementary Schools
Amenia, NY 12501

*Fellow, Elementary School Center
**Member of the Secretary's Elementary Education Study Group

"FOCUS ON THE CHILD"

Respondents' Profiles

WALTER W. BIRGE, III

Walter W. Birge, III is the president of the Board of Fellows of the Elementary School Center. A graduate of The Gilman School in Baltimore, he is the headmaster of The Fenn School in Concord, MA. Mr. Birge was formerly head of The Town School in New York. He has been president of The Elementary School Heads Association and is a member of the Overseer Visiting Committee, Divinity School of Harvard University.

The Fenn School
516 Monument Street
Concord, MA 01742

BERTHA D. CAMPBELL

Bertha D. Campbell is retired Head of the Bureau of Child Development and Parent Education of the New York State Education Department. A graduate of P.S. 11 in Rochester, New York, Ms. Campbell has had experience teaching infants and toddlers and children of all grade levels as well as students in graduate programs. She has also supervised students; worked with parents in parent groups, PTA's, and parent-education centers; been involved with staff development; and directed New York State's experimental pre-kindergarten program and its five-year evaluation. Ms. Campbell has also taught and directed private, public, and university nursery schools and co-ops.

Box 907
Basalt, CO 81621

LUCIANNE B. CARMICHAEL

Lucianne B. Carmichael is an education writer and former principal of McDonogh 15 School in New Orleans, Louisiana. The

author of "McDonogh 15: Becoming A School," she served from 1981 to 1982 as a visiting practitioner at Harvard University's Principals Center. Ms. Carmichael attended Chester Elementary School in Chester, Virginia, and was also a principal of Dibert School and Howard School in New Orleans.

13401 River Road
New Orleans, LA 70131

RAY CORTINES

Ray Cortines is Superintendent of the San Francisco Public Schools. Mr. Cortines attended the Golden Gate Elementary School in San Francisco. Prior to assuming his present position, he was the superintendent of schools in Pasadena and also in the San Jose School District, both in California. Mr. Cortines has taught elementary school in Aptos, California. He also worked as the Assistant City Manager in Pasadena.

135 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

MELVIN D. LEVINE

Melvin Levine, M.D. is Director of the Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning and is Professor of Pediatrics at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine in Chapel Hill. Dr. Levine attended Kensington Elementary School in Great Neck, New York, and is the author of "Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics," "A Pediatric Approach to Learning Disorders," and "Developmental Variation and Learning Disorders." He is chairperson of the Elementary School Center's Advisory Council and has been at the forefront of research in the development and learning difficulties of school children.

University of North Carolina
Biological Sciences Building
Room 220H
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

JOAN LIPSITZ

Joan Lipsitz is Program Director for Education for the Lilly Endowment, Inc., in Indianapolis. Prior to joining the Endowment in January 1986, Ms. Lipsitz served as director of the Center for Early Adolescence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, an organization devoted to furthering discussion about and understanding of the issues surrounding the lives of 10- to 15year-olds. Ms. Lipsitz attended elementary school at the Center Academy of the Brooklyn Jewish Center and began her professional education career teaching junior high school English. She has served as a Program Associate with the Learning Institute of North Carolina, and is the author of "Growing Up Forgotten," a report to the Ford Foundation on the status of programs and research concerning early adolescence, and "Successful Schools for Young Adolescents."

Lilly Endowment
2801 North Meridian Street
Indianapolis, IN 46208

VITO PERRONE

Vito Perrone has just become Vice President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, after having been Dean of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota for many years. He's a graduate of High Street Elementary School in Lansing, Michigan. He has taught at all levels from graduate school all the way up through elementary school. He is the guiding member of the North Dakota Study Group.

Carnegie Foundation for the
Advancement of Teaching
5 Ivy Lane
Princeton, NJ 08540

ALICE G. PINDERHUGHES

Alice Pinderhughes is Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Baltimore City Public Schools. A graduate of Chattalanee Elementary School in Baltimore County, she has taught

kindergarten through grade six and served as an educational specialist for Baltimore's elementary schools. She also worked as Supervisor of Elementary Education, Executive Director of Early Childhood Education, and Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education in the Baltimore Public School system. Ms. Pinderhughes is the author of "Individualization of Instruction" and "Conceptual Teaching Methods."

3 East 25 Street
Baltimore, MD 21218

RUTH E. RANDALL

Ruth Randall was appointed Minnesota's Commissioner of Education in 1983. A graduate of Hazel Dell Township #6, a rural elementary school near Underwood, Iowa, Ms. Randall began her professional career in education in 1956 as a substitute teacher in grades K-8 in Omaha, Nebraska. She went on to serve as a teacher supervisor, principal, and assistant superintendent in schools in Nebraska and Minnesota. From 1981 to 1983, she served as Superintendent of Schools in Rosemount, Minnesota. Ms. Randall was a member of The Task Force on Teaching as a Profession of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy.

712 Capitol Square Building
550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, MN 55101

SAMUEL G. SAVA

Samuel Sava is Executive Director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Formerly Vice President of the Charles Stewart Mott and Charles F. Kettering Foundations, and Director of Research in the U.S. Office of Education, Mr. Sava has taught in elementary schools and been an elementary school principal. A graduate of Pargny Elementary School in Farrell, Pennsylvania, Mr. Sava is the father of two.

1615 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3483

LAWRENCE J. SCHWEINHART

Lawrence Schweinhart is Director of the Voices for Children project of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan. A graduate of St. Helen Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky, Mr. Schweinhart co-directed the Perry Preschool study at High/Scope and is the co-author of "Young Children Grow Up" and "Changed Lives." A member of the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, he also co-directed High/Scope's Preschool Curriculum Comparison study. He is a husband and father of two.

600 North River Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48198

WHAT IS THE esc ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CENTER?

The Elementary School Center (ESC) is an organization which brings together professionals and others involved in the development and education of the child in the elementary school (pre-school through eighth grade). It is like no other association in the country. It is an independent, non-profit, tax-exempt organization.

The objectives of ESC are:

- To improve the quality of schooling
- To serve as a national advocate for elementary schools
- To encourage, implement, and disseminate studies and research about elementary schools
- To increase public awareness of the importance of schools serving children from three to thirteen years old
- To provide a resource center for those involved with elementary schools
- To sharpen awareness of issues affecting elementary education
- To encourage communication and cooperative efforts among different groups working with children and youth of elementary school age
- To expand its activities through participation of its members
- To describe elementary school practices which can strengthen education at all levels

WHY AN esc ?

Recognizing that after the family, the elementary school provides the most significant institutional experience in a child's life, a group of elementary educators and other professionals established the ESC to serve the following needs:

1. the need for greater understanding by the public and the educational world of the power and complexity of the effects of elementary schooling in children's lives
2. the need to view schools as a continuum in which each element must be defined by reference to the others, rather than as a hierarchy in which the latest stage is the most significant.
3. the need to increase regard for elementary educators and other professionals working with the children.
4. the need to attract newcomers to elementary teaching at a time when the number of young children is increasing and teaching staffs are shrinking.

esc MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Membership in ESC is available to:

*teachers	*parents	*scholars
*administrators	*museum educators	*government officials
*pediatricians	*media specialists	*mental health professionals
*computer specialists	*social workers	*school board members

Membership dues (effective for one year) are available as follows:

$125 Institutions $ 45 Individuals

Membership entitles one to:

- "Focus," the ESC Newsletter
- other publications—conference proceedings and occasional papers
- reduced subscription rate to Book Summaries concerning the education of children and youth
- access to developing Resource Center
- advance notice and reduced registration fee (on a space-available basis) to the Annual Conference (to be held on the 4th Friday in January — January 23, 1987): "The Culture of the Elementary School: The World Children, Educators & Parents Create"
- seminars and workshops
- networking with professionals concerned with children
- an active role in ESC.

Fellows

Cary Edward Bell, Ed.D.
Principal, Shoreham-Wading River
Middle School District
Shoreham, NY

**Walter W. Birge, III, Ed. M.*
Headmaster, The Fenn School
Concord, MA

M. Blouke Carus, B.S.
President & CEO, Carus Corporation
Publisher, Open Court Publishing Co. & Cricket
Magazine
Peru, IL

**Anna M. Jones, B.A.*
Director, Charles River School
Dover, MA

**Waldo Jones, B.A.*
Head of Lower School
Pippowan-Cisqua School
Mount Kisco, NY

**Gordon J. Klopf, Ph.D.*
Dean Emeritus,
Bank Street College of Education
New York, NY

Mary Newmann, M.S.W., M.A.
Headmistress, The Town School
New York, NY

Lucille P. Perrman
New York, NY

**Allan Shedlin Jr., M.A.*
Executive Director
Elementary School Center
New York, NY

**Jules Spotts, Ph.D.*
Clinical Psychologist
New Canaan, CT

Norman Charles Walkely, M.A.
Headmaster, Cardigan Mountain School
Canaan, NH

Esther H. Wender, M.D.
Director, Division of Behavioral Pediatrics
Associate Professor of Pediatrics
Montefiore Medical Center and
Albert Einstein College of Medicine
Bronx, NY

Sara Wilford, M.Ed.
Director, Art of Teaching
Graduate Program
Director, Early Childhood Center
Sarah Lawrence College
Bronxville, NY

Justine Winters, M.A.
Principal, Amenia and Millerton Schools
Webutuck Central School District
Amenia, NY

Advisory Council Chairperson

Melvin D. Levine, M.D.
Director, the Clinical Center for the
Study of Development & Learning
Professor of Pediatrics, University of
North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

**Founding Fellow*

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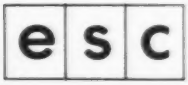

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